

TBI Scripted

Television Business International

Issue #7 April 2017

The magazine celebrating television's golden era of scripted programming



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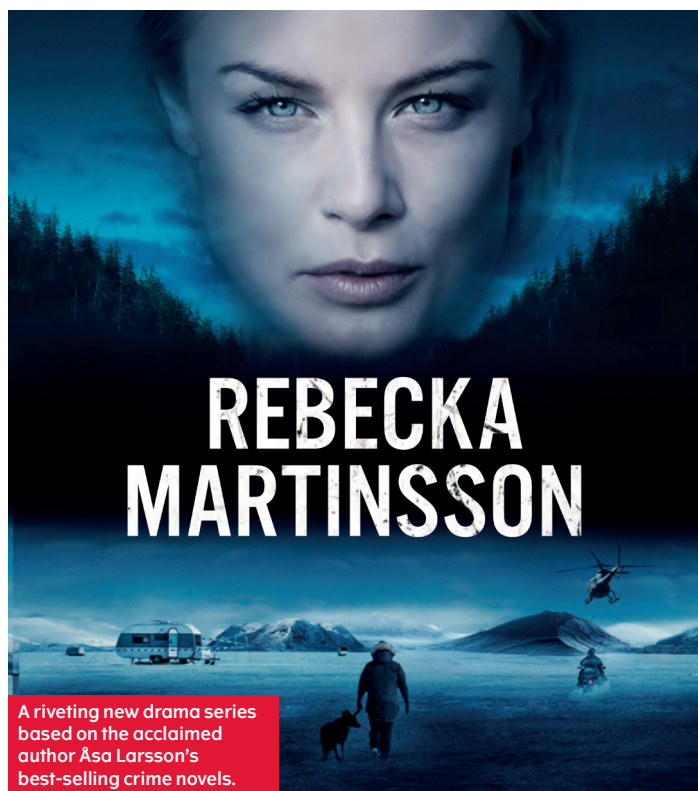
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Editor's Note



The showrunner. The central figure. The beating heart of the biggest dramas.

This edition of TBI Scripted is dedicated to celebrating the role of the showrunner, investigating the mysteries of a job that is so core to the concept of making television in the US.

Just how does one person lead a writers room, hire production staff, decide on visuals and tone, and generally act as the physical embodiment of the programme, all at the same time?

In our central feature, we compare the production models in the States and Europe, where writers rooms are alien, and the writer separate from the executive producer. There are signs that the two models are moving closer together as the international drama business expands and money continues to flow. We assess where things stand.

We also hear from two prominent showrunners, *The Shield* creator Shawn Ryan and *Bull*'s Mark Goffman, who talk about their careers and the influences that helped them gain the tools to take charge of multi-million dollar TV dramas.

Both men say that while the growing number of series launching every year is no bad thing for a creative mind, it is leading to a severe drought in the production ranks, and in writing talent in the US. Could that mean more opportunity for those living in other parts of the world who are ready to chance their arm in Hollywood?

Elsewhere, our regular reports on hot new dramas hitting the international market take us from 1970s London (*Guerrilla*), to Europe's political heartland (*Brussels*), to the Côte d'Azur (*Riviera*). With many in the TV business decamping to Cannes for MIPTV this month, the latter feels particularly timely.

Julia Stiles, Adrian Lester and other stars and producers are set to attend a world premiere screening of Sky and Altice crime drama *Riviera* at the Palais des Festivals during the conference and market. Those sorts of events will be something we'll be seeing much more of in April 2018, when the first International Cannes Festival of Series is scheduled.

If there was ever a sign television drama and the showrunners that make it tick were set to become even more culturally relevant, an event to rival the Cannes Film Festival is just that.

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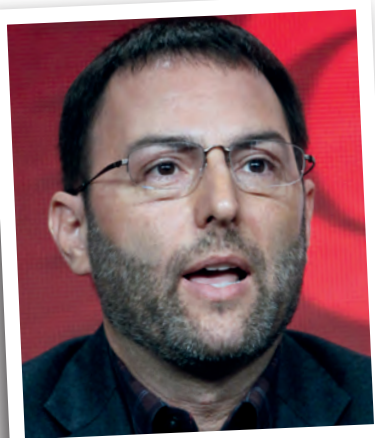


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Taking *Bull* by the horns



Mark Goffman runs the top-rated freshman drama of the 2016/17 season in *Bull*. In this exclusive interview, he tells Jesse Whittock about keeping control of a major network series, his grounding as a writer on *The West Wing* and how his Hollywood career almost didn't happen thanks to a spell in Brussels

Considering Mark Goffman was an economics and international politics major living in the capital of the European Union and writing for *Commerce In Belgium* magazine, it's no surprise he came close to a career in speechwriting. It was, however, the beckoning of Hollywood – specifically Aaron Sorkin's now-legendary writers room for *The West Wing* – that came to define his working life.

As chance goes, Sorkin came calling on the very same day Goffman was offered a job in the US Department of State. "Being in the capital of NATO was a fascinating place to learn about politics and people," he recalls. "I was planning to be speechwriter, as I'm fascinated by what can make people's lives better. Ultimately, I decided I could be more truthful writing about a fictional White House."

By 2006, Goffman was working on Sorkin's NBC series *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip*, running the writers room, before going on to executive-produce Fox's *White Collar* and then showrun another Fox drama, *Sleepy Hollow*, for two seasons.

Having produced hundreds of hours of primetime scripted drama, Goffman now lists NBC's TV reboot of *Limitless* on his CV, and has taken on running CBS's big-rating new season legal procedural, *Bull*.

"*The West Wing* was a great training ground for how to write fiction and elements of plotting," says Goffman. "For me, training under Aaron and then John Wells, who really taught their writers to be showrunners, was phenomenal."

Goffman says Sorkin and Wells both tasked their writers to find the nuances in plots and visuals. This is something he has brought with him to *Bull*, which follows NCIS alum Michael Weatherly as Dr. Jason Bull, a brilliant trial consultant inspired by the career of Dr. Phil McGraw (known to most as syndication's Dr. Phil). "The trials are central, but it's really about the moments that exist around them," says Goffman of the format.

"We are looking at psychology: Bull's whole M.O. is understanding human behaviour in order to get the verdict and justice for his clients, and that theme resonates with everyone in society. In a world of fake news and unfairness, it's really great to know that someone like Jason Bull is looking to get justice for people."

Added to the *West Wing* tropes and psychology are classic CBS procedural beats – the case-by-case nature of the law being perfect for show-of-the-week storylines. "CBS is the best at procedure, so we have to push ourselves to work to come up with innovative procedural beats that work with that," says Goffman.



"The main cause of death in the writers room is if someone says they've heard it before."

Bull, a coproduction of CBS Television Studios and Steven Spielberg's Amblin Television, is the highest-rating new season drama in the US, and has sold into more than 200 territories, including key deals with Fox Networks Group in Europe, ProSiebensat.1 in Germany, Global in Canada, Rai 2 in Italy, M6 in France, and Network Ten in Australia.

Goffman came to *Bull* on the back of an executive producer stint on the short-lived *Limitless*, and via his production deal with CBS, a deal primarily designed to hand him shows to create, develop and run.

With this issue of TBI Scripted being a Showrunners special, how does Goffman assess the international drama market for someone in his position? "On the positive side, I really think it's a golden age of TV," he says. "Almost anything you can dream of can find an avenue to become a reality. There's a hunger for international formats, and there are channels active in almost every genre."



“While the money isn’t the same [at all channels] as at traditional broadcast networks, most writers aren’t motivated by money. That helps when you manage writers rooms.”

The issue is with those writers – and the rest of the hundreds-strong crews needed for a fast-moving, weekly broadcast drama – is actually finding them in the first place.

Bull’s writing team came together in three days, during the mad scrum that follows network upfront announcements of the new season pickups. “There are so many shows that the writing pool is depleted,” says Goffman.

Finding production staff creates the same problem. “For *Bull* – and all network TV – the biggest challenge is we go from essentially zero to 700 people working on the show, with two months to put everyone in place,” says Goffman.

“Often all of the people I know and have worked with in the past are already working. Then you’re hiring a whole new group of people and expecting it to come together very quickly with the same vision. It was very

lucky with *Bull* that we got great producers, and incredible crew from *Sleepy Hollow* and *Limitless*. That’s not always the case.”

The challenges of a broadcast TV show don’t stop once you’ve actually found your team, however. What follows is the little challenge of producing and launching a programme that rates – or the scrapheap awaits.

“Any of the key plots you have backed only has a few episodes to make a mark. That’s the challenge,” he says. “While you may find an outlet, raising above the clutter is difficult.”

As for *Bull*, a quirky legal procedural at heart, Goffman says there were several exciting premises to work with from the beginning.

“First of all, *Bull* is a novel premise; the law is an area I’m deeply interested in that affects lots of people,” he says.

“Plus, we had a built-in character at the core of the show, and Paul Attanasio [*House*] is a brilliant writer. He and Dr. Phil created such an amazing pilot, with well-thought-out characters and excellent dialogue, that I jumped on the chance when it came.

“Added with Steven Spielberg and Amblin, we have some of the most creative minds helping to make the show, so it was a no-brainer. The elements all came together: the [creators] sold that project to CBS in the room.”

Away from broadcast TV, Goffman has over the years attempted to move outside his comfort zone. For example, in 2010 he produced and directed a documentary about five characters at an annual conference held in Ft. Mitchell, Kentucky, the ventriloquism capital of the world, and has plans for more features and novels.

As for international drama, it’s once again Goffman’s past in Europe that informs his outlook. “I love watching international formats, which goes back to my days in Brussels,” he says. “It allows you to find out what other cultures are responding to. South Korea is a fascinating place for scripted at the moment, as is Australia.”

While he found his calling in *The West Wing*, Goffman proves inspiration can come from anywhere and end up in Hollywood. **S**

In the spotlight: Shawn Ryan

The Shield creator on the people, projects and principles that have guided his career to the top of the ladder in Hollywood

Born in the Midwestern city of Rockford, Illinois, Shawn Ryan was destined to revolutionise US crime drama when he dreamed up *The Shield* and its anti-hero, corrupt detective Vic Mackey.

He had, in fact, cut his teeth on a much more conventional star vehicle, NBC drama *Nash Bridges*, where he worked under *Lost*'s Carlton Cuse, following an early career working various writing jobs.

After running *The Shield* for seven seasons, establishing it as a flagship series for Fox cable channel FX, he helmed David Mamet CBS drama *The Unit*, Fox's *Lie to Me* and *The Chicago Code*, and ABC's *Last Resort*. He currently has a deal with Sony Pictures Television and is the writer of NBC time-travel saga *Timeless*, which he co-created.

Here, he tells TBI about his experiences in television.



The Shield

The shows that have shaped how I view television

Nineteen-seventies comedies like *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *All in the Family* were certainly the sort of thing that as a kid made me watch too much TV. I'm the nightmare for a parents' cautionary tale because I managed to turn that into a career.

It wasn't until I was finishing high school in the eighties that *Cheers* came. That was hugely impactful for me, not only because I thought it was the best show on TV, but also because it was the first time I tried to work out why it was better than everything else on TV. It occurred to me that what the characters were saying was funnier than on other shows, and I realised it must have better writers. That was the first time I paid attention to the writing credits.

The people who inspired me to write for television

I got two breaks separated by about four-and-a-half years: an overnight success story and another for which I paid my dues for over a number of years. In the first case, my theatre professor at college encouraged me to submit one of the plays I'd written for consideration at the American College Theatre Festival. It eventually won a comedy award.

As part of that award, I got to come to Los Angeles and sit in on a writers room of an NBC sitcom (*My Two Dads*), which Bob Meyer was running; one of the mid-level writers was Chuck Lorre. At the end of my two weeks there I asked Bob if I could pitch some stories. NBC ended up buying one; two others wrote it, but I was 23 years old and I felt like the whole of Hollywood had opened up for me. I couldn't believe anyone thought breaking into Hollywood was hard. Then it was nearly five years until I got another job.

Eventually, I sold a pilot idea to the old MTM company, which was sold to Fox, and that began a year and a half of freelancing, during which I was able to sell some things. From that I got hired on *Nash Bridges*, my first staff job. I've been fortunate enough to work ever since, and this is my 20th anniversary as a writer.

The lessons I've learned from the writers room

Carlton Cuse was my boss. He and John Worth, his second-in-command, led a small and ultimately very successful writing room – we all still work in the business. *Nash Bridges* was like seventies shows such as *Barretta*, *Ironside* and *The Rockford Files* – they have a desire to tell a hero story. We live in a very anti-hero cable era now, but I learned to write for a format. If Don Johnson looked good, viewers liked it and watched. Writing a star vehicle was a big lesson in that regard. We had only six writers and sometimes had 22 or 24 episodes,



so I had to become very good at taking a format and make it feel different every week. It was a masterclass in breaking a story.

The inspiration for *The Shield*

Nash Bridges inspired me to write *The Shield* because for three years all I'd written was *Nash* doing the right thing. I'd gone on police ride-alongs and seen things that I thought would make for interesting drama but were totally inappropriate for *Nash Bridges*. I was compiling these ideas, and at the end of the *Nash* experience – and because I was still an insecure writer looking for his next job – I had developed *The Shield* as a spec script. I tried to write something that was unlike anything else on TV so it could stand out against other scripts. But I didn't expect anyone to make it as I thought only HBO would,



and it already had *Oz* and *The Sopranos* on air. Also, HBO produced everything itself and this was developed with another company. However, that period of writing without worrying about the audience ultimately made it appealing for FX.

The executives and producers who most influenced me

A lot of network and studio execs are portrayed by the creative community as bumbling people who don't know what they're talking about and get in the way of great art, but that is not my experience.

I would highlight the FX group right at the start of *Shield*, led by Kevin Reilly and Peter Liguori, who wanted to make it. They were so adamant I should be the one running it and making every decision, even though I was woefully ill-equipped to do that.

The ways the industry has changed since then

On a practical level, there are so many shows that the talent pool has really been thinned out, not only for actors, but writers, line producers and crew.

The talent hasn't quite grown to meet the appetite. It used to be that if you got a pilot picked up you'd have no worry getting a great crew together and could take some time, but now it's a feeding frenzy for good actors and line producers.

The other creative difference was that when I started in the mid- to late-nineties there were a lot of shows that in terms of subject matter or approach weren't very

unique, but if you executed them very well they could be very successful. Now, it's harder to get those shows made because there is such a fight for attention between broadcast, cable, streaming and foreign shows – more like the movie business – that we have to find things that scream difference.

The source material I would love to make into TV

This might sound strange, and maybe not the answer you'd expect, but I would love to do an Encyclopedia Brown series, which are kids books that I read when I was 10 years old.

Encyclopedia was the son of the town sheriff who would help his dad figure out the latest mystery in town and solve crimes. Those books made me interested in mystery, and drove much of what I ended up writing. I always thought kids would love the series.

The wisdom I pass on to younger writers and showrunners

From the perspective of a writer, you must always be a tougher critic on your own work than everyone else's. Too many writers are in love with their own work and are shocked when people criticise. Before they get a chance to do that, you have to really clear your own mind and read your material with a critical eye to work out if it is actually good: were you just trying to get through the page with a placeholder? I go through my own pages with a blue pen and look to be really tough – I read as if it's the work of someone I don't like. **S**

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Black Mirror


Show stoppers

The golden age of TV drama has meant more programmes in production, and with resources increasingly scarce, American showrunners are coming to Europe to find work and vice versa. How far have the lines become blurred?

Words: Jesse Whittock

Though the US has been the dominant force in global television for decades, its model of production has rarely been replicated in other territories. Where the showrunner is all-powerful at Hollywood studios, Europe has developed a more collaborative model.

That's changing, however. With television attracting more and more film talent, and streaming services with deep pockets financing all varieties of scripted programmes, and local productions in Europe and the US at all-time highs, the formerly distant models on either side of the Atlantic are meeting in the middle.

"European broadcasters are finding that to compete with American imports they have to be bigger and have similar

production values," says Annabel Jones, showrunner on the UK- and US-produced Netflix dystopian drama series *Black Mirror*. "That means methods are blurring."

The US showrunners, on the other hand, are finding that the number of shows in production means they are struggling to crew their series. "On a practical level, there are so many shows that the talent pool has really been thinned out, not only for actors, but writers, line producers and crew," says Shawn Ryan, best known for FX drama *The Shield* (see page 6). "The talented hasn't quite grown to meet the appetite. It used to be that if you got a pilot picked up you'd have no worry getting a great crew together, and could take some time, but now it's a feeding frenzy."

'The power of the US showrunner'

One effect has been an influx of European producers into the States. Sweden-born Henrik Bastin, CEO of Fabrik Entertainment, took his business to the US some years ago, and has gone on to executive-produce dramas including Amazon Prime Video's crime series *Bosch* with Michael Connelly.

Though familiar with US programming and the system it is created in, Bastin was initially startled by the power structures. "The surprise comes when you find out the power the showrunner possesses," he says. "They truly are the end of the line. They dictate what the shows is all about."

This means control of the writing, casting, hiring, aesthetics and contact with network

and studio execs all go through one, all-powerful person. For Bastin, the choice for *Bosch* was Eric Overmyer, (*The Wire*). Daniel Pyne replaced him for season three.

In European production, Bastin says writers are “normally just a piece of the puzzle”, with directors getting the final say on visual aspects. “It took a while to get my head around my role as a non-writing producer,” he adds.

However, the European TV auteur model, which, contrary to a well-staffed US writers room, sees one scriptwriter take on a programme entirely on their own, is now an option in the States. Nic Pizzolatto wrote all of *True Detective* himself, and while Noah Hawley uses a writers room for *Fargo*, he is known to have penned eight of season one’s 10 episodes before it was even cast.

Broadcaster and writer Charlie Brooker, who along with Annabel Jones runs Endemol Shine Group-backed House of Tomorrow, writes *Black Mirror* in its entirety himself.

The series, which imagines nightmarish ways technology could impact modern life, is part of a growing number of anthology dramas financed by US networks. With Netflix now the sole commissioner, and UK broadcaster Channel 4 no longer involved, the scope has moved beyond Britain, with episodes of season three shot in the US.

Jones oversees the show’s production away from the scripts, building the worlds Brooker imagines. She describes her role as very much more of a US-style showrunner than European executive producer.

“In the UK, the executive producer oversees everything, but they’re not as

involved in the detail, and they rarely go to the set – maybe once or twice during filming,” she says. “It’s not as immersive as the American showrunner, where your job is to do everything. Because *Black Mirror* is an anthology, with different casts and worlds in every episode, I have to be across every detail and every department.”

Europe’s new showrunners

While the showrunner model is relatively alien to UK production, it is more familiar in other parts of Europe. For example, the sheer number of German free-TV soaps forces producers to create small-scale writers rooms, says scriptwriter Korbinian Hamberger.

“It’s new to work in teams across Europe, although they have existed in soaps for



Bosch

years and years,” he says. “That’s why I find it funny that certain primetime TV shows have no idea about them, when it is actually quite normal.”

Hamberger is part of a collection of young European writers – the Dirty Dozen – all graduates of the Serial Eyes postgrad TV drama course at the German Film and Television Academy, studying under pioneering UK-US showrunner Frank Spotnitz (*The X Files*, *The Man in the High Castle*). Graduates take US-style showrunner skills and pair them with local production sensibilities.

“It’s great to have had the training, because the approach is actually still very new in German drama,” says Jana Burbach, another graduate of the programme and now a writer on Arte-ZDF banking thriller-drama *Credo* and head writer of ARD legal drama *Die Heiland*.

“Nobody knows how writers rooms work except in daily shows, so it’s a great

opportunity to communicate how you want to handle the work flow and decision making. It’s an opportunity to convince people this is a good way to work.

“The rooms that do exist tend to be in Europe, and that tends to be because of the number of episodes. I was the least experienced writer in one room but was the only writer with experience of the model. It gives you a special skill-set – moderating rooms and breaking down brainstorming sessions.”

Over in Denmark, the tradition borrows more from the US than perhaps anywhere else in Europe. “We’re among the countries most inspired by the US,” says Morten Kjems Juhl of Studiocanal-owned Sam Productions.

“The reason is DR, our national broadcaster, has continuously sent Danish writers on showrunner courses in LA for the past 15 years. As a small country with a small business, we’ve tuned it that way.

“It’s not an exact copy of the American system and there are differences, but showrunners from France and the UK are much more stuck in their national traditions. It’s mind-blowing for them to go LA and see a writers room operating. For us, it’s the same basic idea – they got it first and we adapted it.”

He recently produced *Below the Surface*, a tense drama originally for Discovery Networks Denmark’s Kanal 5 that filmmaker and director Kasper Barfoed took from development to screen.

Having come from the auteur world of European feature films, Barfoed had never worked in a writers room before, let alone run one. He found the model refreshing and productive, however.

“I had co-written my last feature film, but had never written with a large-scale team,” says Barfoed. “However, Sam has a lot of contact with writers, so I got a room of really smart and experienced people



Below The Surface



The Dirty Dozen

together, and it was a great experience. It was never a problem or a power struggle. It was my thing at the beginning, but the best idea would always win.”

The US model, however, takes the concept of teamwork to another level.

While the showrunner will act as the lead writer, directing the plots, characters and tone and controlling the storyboard, there are often a couple of professional episode writers taking notes.

There are even people in the writers room who rarely pick up a pen at all – many are effectively employed as professional sounding boards, using extensive experience in broadcast and cable plotting to push a concept along.

“A professional episode writer is not competing with the showrunner. It is their job,” says Juhl. “We’re not that hierarchal, but the discipline is the same. Everyone knows what their role is.”

Dirty Dozen’s Hamberger has similar experiences. “In America, you get paid to sit in the writers room on the basic WGA wage,” he says.

“Showrunners would happily pick someone who is a very good brainstormer, but a terrible writer. We can’t do that here because the rooms are smaller.”

A-list talent

Annabel Jones says the rise of A-list acting talent creating drama and comedy for the small screen has dictated change in the US. “Americans have recognised that to pull in talent they can’t make 23-episode seasons, and have reduced the number of episodes for the high-end shows,” she says.

“An actor might give a show enough weeks of their schedule for ten episodes, but they will not have time for 23. Everyone is rethinking the rulebook.”

Equally, top-quality writers can demand their own terms. “It’s a bonanza for TV writers in high demand because they can pick and choose, and when you’re in a boom cycle it’s always the time when showrunners try to realise their own ideas and dreams,” says Fabrik’s Bastin. “That makes executive producers’ jobs harder, as we have to persuade them to come and do our ideas.”

Paradoxically, he believes the volume of shows in production will lead to a new generation of showrunners coming through. “This is a time when new showrunners are born out of necessity,” he says. “The big ones are already doing shows.”

“This happened last in the 1990s with the likes of Steven Bochco and John Wells, when

people took bets on those guys. Though it can be frustrating, ten years from now there will be new showrunners who have emerged through this period.”

Bastin is currently working on *Embassy Down*, which is an eight-hour coproduction between Fabrik parent Red Arrow Entertainment Group’s sales arm, Red Arrow International, and MTG Studios. “*Embassy Down* is being shot in Denmark, but with a Danish showrunner,” he says. “It is going to be the best of both worlds.”

High-end TV is driving such set-ups, he adds. “I have predominantly worked with Scandi creators in my career, but high-end European writers have been looking to the US for a long time, are more understanding of that system, and try to implement it to a certain extent,” he says.

“If anything, we have to push Scandi and European writers, and challenge them – we’re giving them the power to run with it. Some cannot believe they are in charge.”

Embassy Down, a multilayered drama set around a hostage situation at the US embassy in Copenhagen, is for MTG’s Scandinavian subscription video-on-demand service Viaplay. *Black Mirror*’s Jones says the likes of Netflix and Amazon will have a lasting effect on how high-end drama TV is produced: “The rise of the SVOD platforms will see the increase of the auteur,” she says.

Black Mirror is one of the most authored programmes perhaps ever created, with Brooker writing a new set of characters and creating a new world for each episode of the three seasons it has run to so far. Netflix, not beholden to ratings or schedules, has taken a collaborative role next to House of Tomorrow that Jones is keen to talk up.

“Netflix is minded to let the auteur run with their ideas,” she says. “They are not hands off, and they are totally interested, but they present ideas and never a diktat. It’s more hand holding, which is the best way of working, as you do need people challenging your thoughts.”

With international coproductions, especially between the US and Europe, increasing, and on-demand platforms unperturbed by where their originals come from, things only look likely to get blurrier. Luckily, the outlook is bright, according to Hamberger, who says: “Both territories are trying to pick the best of each other.” **S**



Guerrilla tactics

The story of how John Ridley's passion project, *Guerrilla*, became Sky and Showtime's latest star attraction

Act 1 The Black Lives Matter movement brought race relations right back to the centre of debate in the US. In entertainment, scriptwriter John Ridley has done as much as anyone else to highlight the plight of minorities there through his Oscar-winning screenplay for *12 Years a Slave* and hard-hitting ABC drama *American Crime*, which has gone to three acclaimed seasons.

The UK's black community has had its own continuing battles with racism over the years (think the 2011 London riots), but rarely has the subject been meaningfully tackled by its broadcasters. Matching Ridley's straight-talking style to British sensibilities appears to create the makings of a strong attempt to rectify that omission.

Announced as part of European pay TV player Sky's ambitious 2017 slate, *Guerrilla* uses the device of a fictional love story between a politically active couple (Freida Pinto and Babou Ceesay) to recall

the simmering tensions between black and minority communities and a police force dealing with systematically racist elements in the 1970s.

"John has always wanted to do fiction set in fact," says executive producer Katie Swinden.

Ridley conceived the concept for the series about five years ago. While in London working on post-production for Jimi Hendrix biopic *All is by My Side*, he met with producer Patrick Spence, who had launched Tiger Aspect-housed drama outfit Fifty Fathoms in 2010.

Swinden says Fifty Fathoms, the firm's creative chief, exists to push talent to realise passion projects. This ultimately prompted Ridley, who had initially found networks uninterested in *Guerrilla*, to try again. The negative responses ended when Spence took it to Anne Mensah, head of drama at Sky. "She thought it was amazing, and she has been a champion of the project since then," says Swinden.



Act 2

“Sky Atlantic is all about bold, high-quality storytelling, with the very best talent on both sides of the camera,” says Sky director of programmes Zai Bennett. “Therefore, *Guerrilla* is a perfect addition to our world-class original-drama line-up for 2017.”

Even with Sky on board, new production challenges surfaced. Ridley’s reputation (and workload) exploded when *12 Years a Slave* became one of the most important films of 2013, plus he was signed to an exclusive production deal with US broadcaster ABC. This led producers to work out a deal to bring the Alphabet’s edgy cable production division, ABC Signature, on board as a coproducer and co-distributor.

Hollywood actress Pinto was drafted in after meeting Ridley in LA. The role is a departure for the *Slumdog Millionaire* star, and Swinden says it has been “exciting to get the chance to reinvent someone”.

Meanwhile, Wisconsin-born Ridley felt the show needed an authentic, black British voice to bring an understanding of the territory’s racial past. Swinden turned to *The Wire*’s Idris Elba and his increasingly influential prodco, Green Door Pictures.

Elba was immediately keen to both produce and co-star, but again, scheduling was a problem, with his career also on a seemingly permanent upwards trajectory and his diary full to bursting.

“This production was all about getting huge talent in the same place at the same point, but the truth is that when you’re doing big shows you have to take your time,” says Swinden, Fifty Fathoms’ creative director.

The final piece of the financing pie came when Ridley used his positive relationship with Showtime in the US to usher the CBS-owned premium cable channel into the frame as a coproducer.

“It was important we got the right people involved,” says Swinden. “John wrote a very good script, and with Idris as executive producer and co-star, it is just the sort of voice Sky Atlantic and Showtime want.”

With all the pieces in place, Fifty Fathoms and Ridley’s International Famous Players Radio Picture Corporation turned to a pair of racial-history academic experts and others who had experienced the period for advice on narrative and accuracy.

“This is a surprisingly untold story, but many people from the period are still alive, so we were able to translate first-hand experience,” says Swinden. “John asked some of those people to come and sit in the writers room.”

The result, Sky’s Bennett says, is “a fictional exploration of a thought-provoking moment in history, which asks what might have happened if Black Power groups in the UK had turned to violence in their fight for equal rights”.

“In the bold, distinctive, unflinching *Guerrilla* I believe we’ve got another series our viewers will love, and a brilliant addition to our family of ambitious originals,” he adds.

Act 3

Distributor Endemol Shine International had known about the six-part *Guerrilla* long before it debuted to market at MIPCOM last year, when Pinto and Ceesay (*Black Mirror*) came to Cannes for a promotional push. “I work very closely with the Endemol Shine Group production companies, so we knew a long way out that Patrick had been talking to John,” says ESI CEO Cathy Payne.

ESI has already held screenings of the show, one at the London screenings in February and others in Miami and Australia. “This is subscription television and is really intelligent storytelling,” says Payne. “It’s not going to be for everyone – it sits in the pay TV space – and I don’t expect it to sit on channels that rely on soft dramas.”

Payne says the narrative around black history in the US – slavery, Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement, and now Black Lives Matter – is much better known than the story in the UK.

“Now you’ve got the story being told in London in the 1970s. A lot of people don’t associate black oppression with the UK, so this is a very important story to tell.”

Ultimately, *Guerrilla* appears to work best for cerebral audiences not afraid of difficult themes: the love story at the centre of the drama contrasts with the decisions the characters make, and the subsequent consequences. It will also work for Ridley fans. As Swinden notes, “This is very much John’s vision.” **S**

In focus

The show: *Ride Upon the Storm*

The producers: DR Fiktion, SAM le Français

The distributor: StudioCanal

The broadcasters: DR (Denmark), ARTE (France)

The concept: Nordic noir drama set in a family of priests

Faith in Nordic noir

'Ride upon the storm' is a line from the William Cowper poem *God Moves in a Mysterious Way* and the title of a new magic-realism-infused series from *Borgen* creator Adam Price. With some commentators suggesting Nordic noir is running out of steam, Price and *Forbrydelsen* net DR are seeking to reinvigorate drama from the region, and, as such, *Ride Upon the Storm* is a move away from the sombre, gritty crime series that have defined the genre.

Instead, the series is about faith and the modern world, and notions of good and evil. "This was a project borne out of curiosity," says Price. "To try and understand faith and religion as motives for human action and in the context of modern society."

Lars Mikkelsen (*House of Cards*) is the patriarch of a key family in the series, and like their father, his sons August and Christian are priests. August is the model son, while his brother, though similarly talented, is restless and sometimes abusive. It is August, however, who loses his faith, and his relationship with his sibling breaks down.

Price says *Ride Upon the Storm* was formulated while he was working on the final season of political drama *Borgen*. Although it took several years to get into production, it is, he says, a tale for our times, but also one that needed a human touch. "So much right now in terms of society and clashes of culture are questions of religion," he says. "DR said it was interested, so we had to make sure it had the right layers viewers could identify with, because a high-concept idea is no good

without an emotional connection."

DR has played a key role in popularising Nordic scripted programming and its drama boss, Piv Bernth, says it wants to evolve Nordic noir. "It's important we change before the audience gets bored," she says. "We want to be a little bit ahead of the audience."

DR Fiktion is making the series with ARTE in France, ordering two 10-episode seasons off the bat. StudioCanal will distribute, while its subsidiary, Sam le Français is a production partner. Buyers will get a first look at the show at the MIPDrama Screenings, with the series part of a select line-up in Cannes.

One element not previously seen in Nordic noir is magical realism; in the context of this story, miracles. "It's not realistic all of the time," Price says. "It's different to that brand of Nordic series based on gritty, dark realism. I said to Piv, 'Is it okay if this is not realistic all of the time?' If it is dealing with religion, you have to believe that for the people in the story there is a truth in miracles."

In terms of the look of the series, it also breaks away from the sombre tones and colour palette that has become the signature of Nordic series. "It's not muted, it's quite fresh," she says. "The sun is allowed to shine in this."

TBI puts it to Bernth that *Ride Upon the Storm* is the first in a new wave of Nordic noir. "I hope you are right," the DR drama chief says. "We want to do things that are different." **S**

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The *Art of Crime* is a procedural with a twist: rather than a police precinct, it is set in the world of high culture and art. The series is set up as a six-parter at France Télévisions' flagship France 2 net, and will bow on French public television this autumn.

It features Nicolas Glob (*Les Bleus*) as a hotheaded cop who knows nothing about art, but it forced to team up with an art historian from the Louvre in Paris.

French studio Gaumont is making the series and selling it internationally. "This is the first procedural crime drama series set in the world of art," says the firm's Vanessa Shapiro, president, worldwide distribution. "Together the lead characters have to solve a series of modern day crimes that unveil intriguing mysteries of French cultural and historical heritage."

The idea for *The Art of Crime* came from looking at the activities of the Central Office for Combating Trafficking in Cultural Property, a French government organisation that deals with the theft or receipt of stolen property, including artwork counterfeits, that have an artistic or historical value and relate to cultural heritage.

Shapiro says the show has mini-serialised arcs as well as story-of-the-week elements. "It's procedural, but every two episodes feature a complete story arc," she says. "The series has a light tone to it. If I was to compare it to other shows, I'd say it's a bit like *Castle* meets *The DaVinci Code*."

The series was shot in Paris, often in historic and iconic locations. "France is the perfect backdrop for the series because of the wealth and cultural heritage we have," Shapiro says. "World-renowned monuments play a big part of the storytelling, for example the first episodes are filmed at the Louvre, which is the world's largest museum, and Chateau d'Amboise, a once-favored royal residence. Another location is the Musée d'art Moderne, a major municipal museum dedicated to modern and contemporary art."

Production is still underway and Gaumont will be having early-stage talks with drama buyers at MIPTV, as French drama has become steadily more popular in recent years. For Gaumont, the new show will sit alongside other new Gallic scripted titles such as M6 miniseries *The Frozen Dead*.

"There are a lot of opportunities around the world for our French drama series," Shapiro says. "*The Art of Crime* is directed by Charlotte Brändström, who directed *The Disappearance*, and Eric Woreth, director of *Les Petits Meurtres d'Agatha Christie*, a well-received adaptation of the British classic."

She adds that international buyers are getting used to shorter runs, good news for the 6x60mins *Art of Crime*. "The market place has changed significantly in recent years and we are no longer reliant on the 13-episode seasons. Broadcasters often like the shorter format limited series as they can market and launch them as event series to further attract and increase viewership." **S**





Page turner

Novelist Leon de Winter demanded complete freedom from Dutch telco KPN in order to create European political drama *Brussels*, the show's director, Arno Dierickx, tells TBI Scripted

With telecommunications companies increasingly desperate to retain their subscribers and willing to pay for exclusive content to encourage their continued custom, yet another avenue for writers and producers and their ideas has opened up.

Dutch novelist Leon de Winter identified this opportunity when he had a plan to write what Arno Dierickx describes as “the European *House of Cards*”, a concept that ultimately became *Brussels*.

“Leon wanted the series to be written like one of his books,” says Dierickx. “He didn’t want a producer or commissioning editor telling him what to do.”

That’s why he approached Dutch landline and mobile phone provider KPN, which wanted in on high-end drama. It had created an on-demand channel as an add-on for its telecoms subscribers, but was to that point populating it only with music and sports content.

The result was a 10-part commission, with director Dierickx drafted in to work up the ideas in De Winter’s head into a series that draws together the Machiavellian political dealings of *House of Cards* with a wider story about the capital city. Endemol Shine Netherlands was called in as the producer and Endemol Shine International took sales rights outside the Netherlands.

De Winter’s concepts headed “in all directions, meaning I thought I would have to film in all directions”, says Dierickx. The director made early headway on the task by creating a musical edit, which he made

the writer listen to. “This went from opera to slaughterhouse,” says Dierickx, reflecting the various tones in the series.

Dierickx says producing and directing the series was like no other experience he has had: KPN played just a small role in the production, only ensuring the multi-million-Euro budget didn’t spiral out of control, and De Winter’s fluid writing style meant script changes could be made almost on the spot with the actors. “I got from Leon the complete freedom that he had demanded from KPN,” he adds. **S**

In focus

The Show: *Brussels*

Format: 10x60mins; binge-viewing friendly... “Binge watching is like consuming a book, so we worked on ‘chapters’ rather than episodes,” says Dierickx

Plot: “The story of the collision of the powerful and powerless against a backdrop of a city that pulsates with tension”

Starring: Johanna ter Steege, Alexander Lazarev, Carolien Karthaus-Spoor



The view from the Riviera

It's hard to find a more beautiful and glamorous location to shoot than the Côte d'Azur in the south of France, but new drama *Riviera* aims to expose its dark underbelly

Cannes and the Côte d'Azur are synonymous with the international television industry through the MIPTV and MIPCOM events, but they have rarely been used as the backdrop for an actual TV drama.

That changes with *Riviera*, which follows Hollywood actress Julia Stiles (the *Bourne* films) as a resourceful, fish-out-of-water American, Georgina, who decides to investigate the region's underbelly of rich plutocrats and oligarchs, luxury and moral ambiguity after the death of her wealthy European husband on the yacht of a Russian billionaire.

"*Riviera* is about the idea of going down a rabbit hole," says producer Kris Thykier. "Julia's character is not of this world; she is an American who through love of art became an art curator's wife. After he is

murdered, she decides to find out what happened to him and who he really is. It's a voyage of discovery."

Stiles herself has said filming *Riviera* was "such an experience", resulting in a series "driven by a number of powerful female characters".

"What was important in finding our Georgina was that, in a world where people may hide things and could be morally bankrupt, she is someone relatable with natural integrity, sitting in the middle," says Thykier.

Joining Stiles onscreen are Adrian Lester (*Undercover*), who also directs two episodes, dealer Iwan Rheon (*Game of Thrones*) and Dimitri Leonidas (*The Monuments Men*) as the sons of Stiles' dead husband, and others including Lena Olin, Roxane Duran, Amr Waked and Igal Naor.



In focus

Format: Ten-part pay TV drama

Producers: Archery Pictures, Primo Productions

Auspices: Neil Jordan (creator, EP), Liza Marshall (EP), Kris Thykier (EP), Paul McGuinness (EP), Foz Allen (producer), Philipp Kadelbach (lead director), Laurie Rose (director of photography)

The series comes from writer and director Neil Jordan (*The Borgias*), who developed the series from an idea former U2 manager and film producer Paul McGuinness had been envisaging for many years. Booker Prize winner John Banville is co-writer. “Paul has had a house in the French Riviera for 20 years,” says Thykier. “He approached me about three-and-a-half years ago with the concept, as he thought there was something in that world that hadn’t been touched in a long time.”

The shooting took place on location, which Thykier says was “a big call”, but one made to represent the area and take advantage of the natural beauty of the sun-drenched promenades, golden sand beaches and classically French hillside villas.

Riviera will air on pay TV operator Sky in the UK, Ireland, Italy, Germany and Austria this year, as part of a major high-end-drama push, reaching a total of 21 million subscribers. French pay TV operator Groupe Altice, making its own push into originals through its Altice Studios arm, became a coproducer in March.

Thykier (*Kiss-Ass*) is producing the series with his former Archery Pictures partner Liza Marshall (*Taboo*), who launched Hera TV in January. Primo Productions joins Archery on the production, with distributor Sky Vision bringing Stiles and her co-stars back to Cannes for a worldwide premiere at MIPTV at Monday, April 3, at 6.30pm local time in the Grand Auditorium of the Palais des Festivals. **S**



End game

Colin Callender talks about piecing together the elements for upcoming BBC and Starz period drama *Howards End*

Howards End, the E.M. Forster novel first published in 1910, is considered by many as a masterly treatise on society and class. It focuses on three fictional families – the cultured and idealistic Schlegels, the wealthy and business-minded Wilcoxes, and the working-class Basts – and a dispute over the titular home of the Wilcoxes, *Howards End*.

Though a Academy Award-winning 1992 film based on the book was considered a worthy screen outing, Colin Callender believes a new BBC-Starz television miniseries will delve deeper into the themes of class warfare, societal change and the role of women.

“It’s the story of an England at the cusp of social change and how existing class and social structures got caught in that,” he says, adding that the television narrative will “really be one of women finding their way in the world”.

Taking the pivotal Margaret Schlegel role is Hayley Atwell, whose star remains in the ascendant through the Marvel Universe movies and films. She is familiar to US audiences through ABC drama’s *Marvel’s Agent Carter* and *Conviction*, which Callender says is a lucky accident.

“Hayley had all of the qualities for Margaret,” he says. “It is nice she has profile in America, but that certainly didn’t come into our decision to cast her. You should never cast for the marketplace.”

She is following on Emma Thompson’s Academy Award-winning portrayal of the character, while writer Kenneth Lonergan’s film counterpart, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, picked up a Best Adapted Screenplay gong.

Lonergan’s pedigree in both theatre and television writing stands him in good stead.

Callender, whose Playground Entertainment prodco has focused on bringing TV, film and theatre talent together (Mark Rylance in BBC drama *Wolf Hall*, for example), says that Lonergan, who was nominated for a Best Director Oscar for *Manchester by the Sea*, has “written a gloriously witty, smart and accessible script, and burrowed down in the core of the central relationship”.

“He is a playwright who has a very fresh take on how to make this of the moment and not a dusty period piece,” adds Callender. **S**

In focus

The Show: *Howards End*

Producer: Playground Ents in assoc with City Ents and KippSter Ents

Format: 4x60mins

Writer: Kenneth Lonergan

Director: Hettie Macdonald (*White Girl*)

Starring: Hayley Atwell (*Marvel’s Agent Carter*), Matthew Macfadyen (*Ripper Street*), Tracey Ullman (*Tracey Ullman’s Show*)

Drama school

If one of the roles of TV drama is to shine a light on real-life issues, *The ABC* tackles some gritty topics head-on. Education, race relations and identity are all themes in the six-part drama for Channel 4 in the UK.

Another role of drama is to entertain, and if the premise of *The ABC* sounds heavy going, The Forge, which is producing, set out to cover the issues at hand with warmth and humour.

"In one way it's sort of *Shameless* for schools," says Louise Pedersen, CEO of All3Media International, which is selling the series internationally.

"It's about a largely Asian and white school coming together, and what that says about cultural and educational issues," she adds. "It's not just about the kids, but is also about the teachers trying to make the school a success. We think it will be a compelling, modern school or precinct-based drama that raises issues we grapple with – all with a warm-hearted approach."

The *Shameless* connection resonates on more than one level, given that show was produced by Company Pictures, the firm that Forge founder George Faber previously created. Two of *The ABC*'s creators, Kevin Erlis and Malcolm Campbell, also worked on the earlier show.

At a corporate level, All3Media owns Company, while All3Media International has a first-look deal with The Forge. *The ABC* is the second show out of the pair's first-look deal following last year's miniseries *National Treasure*.

Faber describes the show as follows: "A returning series set in a school in the North of England, in a town with a white and Asian

community who live side-by-side, but have completely separate lives," he says. "Our school has merged an all-white school with an all-Asian school, and we join them on day one. This is a very segregated town, so the school is a social experiment and we're looking at what happens when two tribes are brought together under one roof."

The Forge founder says tackling sometimes difficult subject matter in a relatable way is in the DNA of the writing team. "Ayub Khan Din wrote a film called *East is East*, which was very successful internationally, and was warm, funny and surprising in the way it looked at growing up in a Pakistani family in the 1970s. Our show is warm and funny with really engaging relationships."

In the UK, Channel 4 will run *The ABC* at 8pm, marking the free-TV channel's return to weeknight drama in that primetime slot. The show bows at an as-yet-undisclosed point in 2017.

Jo Joyner plays the dedicated head of the freshly-minted Ackley Bridge College, and her ex-*Eastenders* colleague Paul Nicholls is her on-screen husband and school P.E. teacher. The cast of pupils includes Sam Bottomley (*Jericho*), Fern Deacon (*The Enfield Haunting*) and Arsher Ali (*Four Lions*).

While the series is billed as an insight into modern Britain, the producers are convinced it will find an audience outside the UK. "We're looking at the kids, we're looking at the teachers, we're looking at their homes, and hopefully that makes it a show that will resonate all over the world," Faber says. "This is going to be so pertinent, political and relevant to us all." **S**



In focus
The show: *The ABC*
The producer: The Forge
The broadcaster: Channel 4 (UK)
The distributor: All3Media International
The concept: Primetime drama about the coming together of white and Asian schools

Writer's Room:

Jimmy McGovern

Jimmy McGovern has a reputation for tackling social issues head-on. Through *Hillsborough*, *The Accused*, *Dockers* and *The Street*, he is known for using TV to shine a light on the stories and struggles of working people in the UK.

In ITV crime drama *Cracker*, he created a UK hit that travelled across the Atlantic, was remade for ABC, and was sold back into the UK (and broadcast as *Fitz*).

The fifth of nine children, McGovern went to a church school in his native Liverpool. His new drama, *Broken*, follows a Catholic priest from the north-west of England struggling with issues from his past, while working through those faced by his parishioners. It is, McGovern says, *Game of Thrones* star Sean Bean's best work.

The reason I wrote the film *Priest* in 1993

The only reason I did the film is that the BBC kept turning it down as a drama series. The head of drama back then was Michael Wearing, who was great but didn't want to know.

Sean Bean has a really interesting arc in *Broken*

Anybody of my age coming through the experiences I came through with Jesuit priests ends up harmed, and that's what happened to this character. He's been totally screwed up.

We're blessed with great priests in Liverpool

They wouldn't last there unless they concerned themselves with issues that affected their parishioners: poverty, unemployment, sickness, marriage, death and social issues. The priest as social worker is crucial, particularly in a city like that.

We planned a story-of-the-week set-up in *Broken*

I like that style, and used it on [BBC dramas] *The Accused* and *The Street*. It's a great way to work, but as soon as it became apparent we might get Sean Bean, it ceased to be an option.

Landing Sean Bean was a curse and a blessing

A curse in that I had to get to work again, but a blessing in that it's a much better series, and I think the best thing he has ever done.

Inside *Broken* is the idea there's no safety net

There is a female character with three kids who loses her job and gets nothing, no help whatsoever. All she has done all her life is work, but she is skint and it is shocking.

I had bets on Trump and Brexit, and I won

I'm not saying how I voted [in the UK referendum on EU membership] and I'm not saying I like Trump – I think he's a bloody idiot – but I saw it coming.



I have my eye on a new script

It's written by a woman with very little experience, and it's about the NHS. It's a fascinating script, so I might ask if we can work together on it. I think it will be a single film.

I'm hopeless at business. I'm terrible

George Faber offered me a partnership, and he sold his company for millions; Nicky Schindler offered me a partnership and she sold for millions. That said, I'm really well paid, I don't come cheap. I have enough so that if I didn't work again I'd be fine.

You see shows that totally restore your faith

I loved [Channel 4 series] *Cucumber*. I thought that was fantastic, brave and risk-taking, but you do still see crap as well.

I had nothing to do with *Fitz*

I just said 'give me your money'. I really should have involved myself.

I did Channel 4 *Dockers* docudrama for nothing

Part of the reason I did it was because the Americans were doing *Fitz* and I was told I'd be a multimillionaire, but it was pulled and I had to carry on as if nothing had happened.

TV should be better now because there's more money

Whether it is better than the old days I don't know. I loved Dennis Potter [*The Singing Detective*]; I thought he was fantastic. There's nobody like him now. **S**



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